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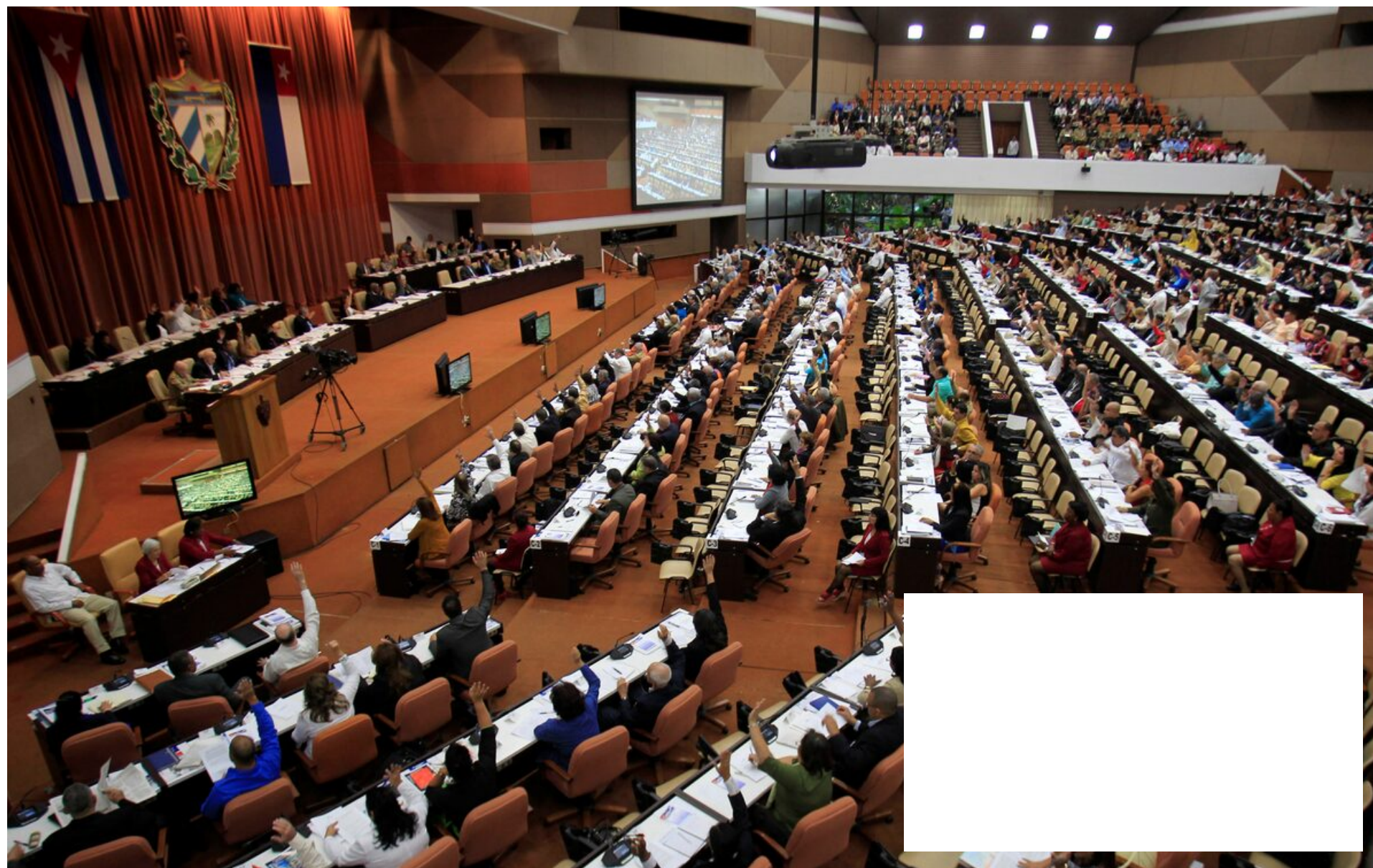
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Cuba quietly authorizes euthanasia

By Marc Frank and Nelson Acosta

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A general view of a session of the National Assembly in Havana, Cuba, December 21, 2018. REUTERS/Stringer/ File Photo [Purchase Licensing Rights](#)

HAVANA, Dec 22 (Reuters) - Cuba on Friday became the second country in Latin America and the Caribbean to authorize euthanasia, following Colombia.

The Communist-run country's National Assembly passed the measure as part of legislation updating the nation's legal framework for its universal and free healthcare system.

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"The right of people to a dignified death is recognized in end-of-life decisions, which may include the limitation of therapeutic effort, continuous or palliative care, and valid procedures that end life," the final draft of the legislation stated.

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Euthanasia and medically assisted suicide, opposed by most religions, sparks huge controversy around the world where just a handful of countries allow the practice and some equate it with murder.

The Cuban Roman Catholic Church was not immediately available for comment.

At Havana's Institute of Oncology and Radiobiology, the country's leading cancer center, Dr. Alberto Roque, who has a masters in bioethics, welcomed the measure and said it established the "legal framework for future euthanasia in any of its forms, that is, active euthanasia or assisted suicide."

There was barely a mention in Cuba's state-run media that the government would approve the practice, and no public debate, though Dr. Roque said that would change as regulations were drawn up.

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Outside the cancer institute, 47-year-old nurse Suaima Lopez, suffering from rectal cancer, said she favored euthanasia in case she or other patients did not recover.

"Families want to keep loved ones alive until the very, very last moment but one has to think of those suffering," Lopez said.

"If only we could have a dignified death ... at a certain moment when nothing can be done anymore ... let me die peacefully, in peace and harmony," she said.

Switzerland, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Canada, Australia, Spain, Germany, New Zealand and some states in the United States also allow euthanasia and, in some of these countries, medically assisted suicide where there is great suffering but no terminal illness.

Reporting by Marc Frank; Additional reporting by Nelson Acosta, Anet Rios and Alien Fernandez; Editing by Andrea Ricci

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